

Steven Biondich

Good afternoon,

My name is Steve Biondich, and I am currently the Mayor of Biwabik. I also stand here as someone who worked for 17 years in the mining industry until I was laid off this spring but still serve as the current Financial Secretary for the United Steelworkers Local 6115. This gives me a unique vantage point: I know firsthand how deeply connected our communities are to mining, both for jobs and for the future of small towns like mine.

I am speaking today in support of U.S. Steel receiving a variance on its water discharge permit.

Mining is the lifeblood of the Iron Range. Families, schools, and businesses all depend on its stability. When facilities like Keetac face regulatory uncertainty, it creates ripple effects that jeopardize employment, tax revenues, and community investment.

To be clear-I believe in protecting our natural resources. Our lakes, rivers, and wild rice are treasures that deserve strong stewardship. But I also know the science behind sulfate standards is unproven, and site-specific standards are a practical solution. A variance does not mean a free pass; it means allowing a pathway forward while continuing to research and improve the processes.

I urge the MPCA to support this variance. It will keep hardworking people on the job, give communities stability, and still uphold Minnesota's commitment to environmental protection. We can do both: protect our water and wild rice- and protect our way of life.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.